The Social Pirates The Master Swindlers

Plot by George Bronson Howard, Novelization by Hugh C. Weir

ONA HARTLEY and Mary Burnett rveyed, with something like loath the meal that was to serve them for dinner. A few buns, a package of crackers, a bottle of package of crackers, a bottle of milk Filling enough, such food might be, but it was neither appe-tizing or satisfying in any real sense and their surroundings would have amazed those who had known them in the days of their pros-perity. They were in a cheap room of a cheap odging house, and their clothes were shabby. Their personal belongings had been reduced to a

minimum.
"Oh!" said Mona, despairingly, as she picked up a bun. "Mary-if we could only have a real dinner-in a place where the waiters know what you want before you do yourself, and the linen is

clean and the silver bright---"Don't" said Mary, sharply. "It only makes it seem worse if we think of things like that."

"Oh, I know," said Mona. "Mary, something has got to turn up pretty soon. Do you realize that we haven't had such a run of luck since we first decided that we had a right to make the world pay us the living it owes us?"

BUNS again," said Mary, next day. She looked P regretfully at the single dime she held in her hand. "Ten cents apiece for dinner, Mona Come on—let's dine out." We'll buy our buns and

eat them in the park or some place like that."
"All right," said Mary, listlessly, "I saw a store yesterday where the buns looked bigger than at the place we've been going to. Let's try them. It's not much farther."

Important events have hung on desicions as trifling and as wholly dictated by chance as that one of the two girls to try a new bakery. While they were selecting their buns they saw a young man who was giving an order at the desk. was a flashy-looking youth, with a touch of the Bohemian about him. And Mona, peering at him. was convinced that she had seen him somewhere in the past. He paid no attention to either of the girls, and Mona had a good chance to study bim. She noticed that he kept his left hand care fully in his pocket. But an accident, the dropping of some of the coins he had received in chang compelled him to remove it and naw Mary's tention was attracted as well as Mona's. Both were struck by the curious tattooed design on the back of the hand a design familiar to them as "The Devil's Sign," consisting of a small demon dancing on an inverted cross. But it was only Mona who seemed to see any real significance in this. Mary understood her signal, and they both

"But why?" asked Mary, when they were on

"I think I know him," said Mona "And if I am right I believe we're not wasting our time. There's no reason why we shouldn't follow him. is there? There's nothing else that we have to do that is more promising

"I suppose not." said Mary, "But that doesn't

Even when the young man turned in at the Impressive entrance of the Colombian Art Mu-seum, Mona insisted on following him. And when she saw him sit down before a certain picture, unpack a small easel, and set to work copying the picture, she was greatly excited.

"Yome on," said Mona, "I want to see the picture. I think I know it, but I want to make

"It's the 'Monna Vanna!" said Mary, after they had slipped up behind the painter, without attracting his attention, and glimpsed the name-

plate on the picture.
"I thought so!" said Mona, triumphantly. *Come on-I want to show you something in the

"There" she said "'Raphaelo - Monna Vanna—1532. Considered by many to represent the greatest phase of the master. Loaned to the Columbian Collection as J. de Vecra (rogan, Value estimated at \$125,000.7

"I don't see what good it does as," said Mary,

"Wait! Now I know who that young charl is who is copying it. Harry the Hun, Mary most famous picture thief in the world. He's donimpossible things, and he's never been caught and held. If he's copying that picture it's because be means to steal it"

"Well—that's his business," said Mary, "1

"If we know what he's planning to do why Isn't there a chance for us to cut in somehow?" asked Mona. "We can surely find some way to profit by what we've found out! And I don't mean giving him away, either."
"Well, I'll admit frankly that I don't see any

chance," said Mary, "But there's nothing else in might. I suppose we might as well wait for his get through here and see where he goes. No harm in that.

"No harm-and a lot of good, perhaps," said Mona. "I've got a feeling that we've stumbled on some good luck, Mary."

There was a small park opposite the mu-Seum, and here they sat and are their decidedly fragal repast. They had some time to wait, but they were glad to see, when Harry did appear, that he paid no attention at all to them. He hurried off, instead, as if he had an appointment to keep, and they had to walk fast to keep him in sight. They managed it, however, and saw him go into a curious little store. The shop, if its sign could be believed, was kept by one Melnotte, and its windows indicated that anything might be bought within or sold. The most extraordinary collection of odds and ends was visible, and, among other things, a few paintings, which. Mona said, were of no great value or importance. But Mona was breathing fast, none

"Melnotte!" she said. "Now I'm sure. Mary! This store is just a blind! Melnotte is one of the most famous 'art fences' in the country. Connoissears who care more about what, is in their collections than how they obtain their treasures know him. He has been receiver for all sorts of stolen art treasures for years!"

"I'm beginning to think you're right, and that this is going to be worth while, Mona," said Mary. "The thing for us to do is to establish a connection with Melnotte and I think I see a way to do it, too!"

"Now that I've got you interested I'm sure we're going to get something done!" said Mona. confidentially. "It's when you can't see a way that I'm afraid, Mary."

'Well, you've got your part to do, too," said Mary. "You used to study art. Can you paint well enough to pretend you're making a copy of the Monna Vanna?"
"Just about," said Mona. "They wouldn't

throw me out if I went there to make a copy.'

Next morning the paths of the two girls diverged for the time. Mona, with her easel and her painting things, went to the museum. Harry was not there when she arrived, but after she had wandered about for a time, enjoying the opportunity to look at the pictures, she saw him come in and take his place before the Monna Vanna. She waited a little longer, and then went up to him, rather timidly

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she said. "I wonder-would you mind very much if I sat here and copied the picture, too?"

He turned to her with a faint start of annovance. But she was pretty enough to disar him at once. However, it was in a rather ungracious tone that he replied:

is not my picture, my dear young lady," he said. "You or anyone else can come here and copy any picture you like."

Despite this rather rude beginning, they were soon chatting amicably.

Mary, meanwhile, had also been at work, She had taken out from the trunk the two old pieces of jewelry that Mona had found and cleaned them, although she did not clean them so well as to make them look too new. And with these she went to the shop of Melnoste. She was lucky enough to find Melnotte disengaged. He sized her up at once, from her timid, indifferent manner, as a woman in distress, and, because she was good looking, attended to her himself.

"I-- I want to borrow something on these, if you please," she said, laying her trifles be-fore him. He picked them up, sniffed, and then pushed them back to her.

"For heaven's sake—what do you bring me stuff like this for?" he asked, contemptu-ously. "This is nothing but junk you've got, my dear! And this isn't a pawn shop! We buy -- and, of course, for a good customer, we will sometimes arrange a loan."

Mary looked at him piteously, And then,

as she picked up the pin and the bracelet she

began to weep.
"Oh-oh!" she sobbed. "What am I to do? What am I to do? I have nothing else left and you say these are worthless? Oh, I don't know what to do I have got to have money, or I'll be put out of my room."

Melnotte was a pretty thorough paced secondrel but he had a streak of sentiment in him that made him sorry for Mary. He might have conquered that and have hardened his beart if she hadn't keen so unusually attractive. But the whole thing was too much for him. He may have had a vague idea that if he put so pretty a girl under obligations to him he might make her like him well enough to be rather one to him later. So he came around the counter and took another look at

"Well, now, I'll tell you, young lady," he said. "I ought not to have said this was junk. It's old stuff, and I suppose the things are heir

"Oh, ves." solded Mary, "They've been in my family ever so long, and I wouldn't dream of parting with them if I weren't so desperate?" "Well, well, don't cry," said Melnotte. "I'll

tell you, the value of these things is sentimental No one would buy them from me, so it wouldn't so husiness for me to give you anything for them. but I don't like to see you in trouble. You keep the things and I'll see what can be done for you. Suppose you let me walk around to your rooms with you and see if I can't keep your landlady

Mary understood his purpose perfectly well He wanted to see if she had been telling the But she agreed, tearfully, and in a few minutes gave him ample proof of her story. He was impressed by the barren poverty of the room she shared with Mona, and he did not notice that anyone else lived in the room. There was little enough, indeed, to indicate that there were two, of them there!

"How much tio you owe?" he asked. Mary told him the exact amount-because, of course she expected, indirectly to get much more out of him than she could have done by naming a greater sum, which must still have been petty

"There you are" he said "Till lend you the money, and when your ship comes in you can

Mary was overcome with gratitude, and she lid not resist when he took her hand and comforted her by patting it. She did cry, however, "Ob-it's hard to take charity!" she sobbed.

"(ould you isn't there some work I could do for you in your shop? Then I'd feel I was earning the money, at least!"
"Why -" he said, and paused, struck by the Mary would be near him, under his in fluence, if he gave her a place! And-who could

MELNOTTE TO HELP HER.

tell? "Yes-I think there might be," he said.

"Come around in the morning and I'll find some-thing for you to do!"

heard what had happened. "See! We're sure of

our room a little longer, and everything is work-

ing out just the way we wanted it, too! I'm more

certain than ever that Harry's going to steal the

picture. And if you're going to be in the store

you certainly ought to be able to find out who they're going to sell it to!"

must have some plan. This picture is too well

known for anyone to be able to show it as his

That's what puzzles me," said Mary, "They

"I told you!" said Mona, exultingly, when she

(COPYRIGHT BY KALEM COMPANY.) own after it's been stolen, isn't it? And who would pay a great price for a picture that he would have to keep hidden after he got it?" "That's perfectly true," said Mona. "But

Harry doesn't waste his time. You may be sure that if he takes the risk of stealing the Monna Vanna he and Melnotte have got a purchaser picked out for it already:"

"Won't the theft be discovered at once?" "I don't know. Not if Harry is as clever as he usually is. He stole a Gainsborough from the National Gallery in London and the theft wasn't the picture Harry had stolen, and put it carefully into the frame from which the copy that Harry had substituted for it had been taken!

That was the one thing Mary had not expected them to do. She had been certain somehow, that still another copy, perhaps the one Harry had been making, was going into that frame, and her whole play had been based upon that certaints. She knew that Melnotte had been in communication with a famous collector. a rival of trogan, the lender of the Monus Vanna to the Columbian Museum, named Well

ington Watson. And she had been sure, too, that she had seen through the plan they had made to hoodwink Watson. Now she was completely baffled, and she realized that she would, at the

THEY SHOWED WATSON THE GREAT PAINTING AND HE WAS TREMENDOUSLY EXCITED.

discovered for six months. Even then they only suspected him they couldn't prove that he was

The next day Mary reported to McInotte and went to work, and Mona resumed her conving at the museum. For a few days nothing of importance happened.

"He keeps me upstairs, most of the time," Mary told Mona, "I'm sorting out a lot of things he has there in a sort of store-room. There's a copy of your Monna Vanna picture, by the that looks quite old, and that is pretty good, !

"It's been faked to make it look old, probably," said Mona. "Well. I haven't se much to report. Harry's getting a little nervous because I'm there, I think. You see, if he is going to steal the picture, having me around must be emproved in the care." arrassing. He can't very well take it while I'm looking on, you see. He offered to help me with my copy today."

"Let him-tomorrow," said Mary. "I think it's time. I'm pretty sure I know what they've got up their sleeves now."

"Too had about Harry," said Mona. "He could have made good as an artist."

"I suppose it is the old story," said Mary, hitterly, "Just as it was with us. If word had a chance to make a living without the schemes we've had to resort to, we'd have been right, too."

Mona gladiv Harry's offer to help her with the daishing ouches her copy required. She thanked him when it was done, and went away. But she lingered and saw him come out, and then she re-turned and took up the watch from a nock she had discovered in her wandering- in the museum. It seemed, however, that she was doomed to be disappointed, for Harry did not return as she had supposed he would.

Mary, however, saw him come into Melnotte's and she was able to hear him tell the dealer that he was going to "turn the trick" about noon.

when there would be few visitors. When he went out with the copy of the Monna Vanna that she had found in the storeroom hidden under his coat, she telephoned to Mona, who had agreed to be in a certain ray sta-tion near the museum And Mona at once burried back to her hiding place. just in time to be out of sight when Harry resumed

his copying.
She saw him take the *purious Mona Vanna from under his cont; saw him, too, cover the back of the cop; with paste. Then, very swiftly and dextermists, he cut the weal painting from its frame, and substituting the copy, smoothed it down. And, after he had hidden the Monna Vanna, he calmly sat down and resumed his copying! attendant passed soon afterward, but saw nothing wrong, and Mona wanted

to applaud Harry's ness and nerve. He gave absolutely no sign, as the MONA PREPARES TO COPY THE FAMOUS MONNA VANNA WITH man passed him, of being nervous. And not until he had been at work for some time did he actually take his departure. He passed out of Mona's ken then, of course, but passed into Mary's as soon as he reached Melnotte's. Neither man was at all suspicious of

> portunities for observation tremendously. She managed to see Harry take the stolen picture and show it to Melnotte. And then she saw something that surprised her, and upset all her calculations. They took the real art treasure,

Mary. She had rendered herself thoroughly un-

obtrusive ever since she had come to work, and

they took her pretty much for granted That

suited her very well, because it increased her op-

eleventh hour, have to make an entirely new plan, unless she wanted all the work she and Mona had already done to go for nothing. Her only grain of comfort was that she

heard Melnotte, speaking over the telephone, make an appointment with Watson, for the following afternoon. They were to meet at the museum. Mary was afraid to jump at a conclusion again, our she did feel that there was a now to suce the day.

"We're like people working in the dars," she told Mona, that night, when the two companies notes. "So far there's been altogether too inguess work to suit me and from now on I'd like to have some facts to work with."

"We've got to have them?" said Mena. "Vid the one essential thing is to overhear the conversation tomorrow when Melnotte meets Watson at the museum.

Mary nodded her agreement "You'll have to be the one to get these facts," she said. "And I don't see how you're going to do it! They're sure to be suspicious if there's anyone within earshor."

"Leave that to me," said Mona, confidently. "The made one or two discoveries about that museum since I've been working there with Harry Did you ever hear of the whospering gallery?",

"Yes," said Mary, originating. "Do you mean to say there's something of the sort in the

"The acoustics are yest peculiar," said Mona-"I won't make any promises at all, but I have hopes very high hopes." And the next day she took up her watch in

a certain spot in the gallery. From where she waited she could not see the despoted trame of the Morina Vinnia at all, but that did not troub her. And, some enough, after a little time, she heard the come of Melnotte.

"I told you would be surprised, Mr. Watson" said the dealer. "I needn't point out to a real collector like yourself that this is a singularly impodent copy of the famous Monfa Vanna" "By jove" said a voice that was stronge to Mona-the voice of Watson. "You're right.

What a scandal The estimable Mr. Crogan has certainly

footed the public this time?" said McInotte "the give the man his due - he - a tool, not a crook," said Watson. "Fre no dictor to thought be lead the real thing, and I happen to know that be paid a stiff price for this forgers of his "He's always refused to take competent adbegan Meinotte.

"Meaning yourself?" suggested Watson. Far remoted from them though she was, every word came clear and distinct to Mona's alert ears. And yet she knew that had she been within a moren feet of them she would have beard only to indistinct and menningless mumur. It was a curious trick of acousties, throw this spot and that, that brought the sounds to

Melnotte ignored the collector's interruption "I suppose you'd like to know where the final is?" he said.
"Would I:" said Watson. "I'd buy it in like

shot and present it to the museum, just for the pleasure of seeing (rogan squirm the ignor-

"Well-it's not very far from here," said Melnotte. "It's in my shop, to be frank! I know I can trust you to respect my confidence!" There was an exclamation of amazement

"Well-1 shall certainly have to see if you right!" he said. "And if you are I'll be as

are right!" he said. "And if you are I'll be as good as my word—I'll take it off your hands and give it to the museum myself! Perhaps people won't take a new rich dabbler in art like Crogan so seriously after this!" Once more Mona had to suffer the strain of

waiting to learn from Mary the outcome of some-thing of which she herself had seen the beginning. But she could wait patiently; she was sure that when Mary came home there would be news. And, as a matter of fact, she had not quite long to wait. She hurried home herself, and in a little while the telephone rang.

"Quick!" gasped Mary. "I've only a second.

Bring your own copy of the Monna Vanna down here at once! Come right into the shop-neither Harry nor Melnotte will be there. I'll meet you

and get it from you. I can't explain more."

Mona was mystified, but Mary's tone convinced her that it was of the utmost importance that she should obey her chum to the letter. She wrapped up the copy she had made, laughing the while at its ridiculous character. It was see a copy, she knew, despite the help Harry given her, that it was grotesque, and it would not deceive anyone who knew the original picture for a single minute. Nevertheless, she decided if Mary wanted it, she should have it

But it was with even greater impatience that she wilted at home, after a momentary take with Mary, who had, of course, no time to tell her what was going on. And when Mary came in Mona pounced upon her before the could even take off her hat.
"Look!" eried Mary dramatically whe letted

her skirt, and underneath, pinned fast to the underskirt, was the precious picture itself no copy, but the original masterpiece, the famous -

Monna Vanna!
Mary!" cried Mona, in a panic. "Whatever are you going to do with that?"
"Ab—that I don't know muself, yet!" said

But Mona got the story, oft or bit. "They came back - Harry and Melnotte-with Watson," said Mary. "And they showed him the picture. He was tremendensly excited not in stirred up as I would have been if some one had offered me a wonderful diamond necktage they talked a lot about showing up a man care-Crogan-

'I can tell you about that " said Mona and

"I see!" waid Mary. "Well, all, way Me M. said be would take the picture and Melmore to send it to his house this afternoon life offers is a check, but Melnotte said he would like to see the cash, and Mr. Watson told his all right to

come and get it this evening
"I told you Harry the Hur would have a war
of getting rid of the picture" said "ona
"That was enough for me and was would
slipped out and telephoned to a said Marry. "Later, after Watson had government and war a get the picture ready to send the picture ready the picture ready to send the picture ready to send the picture ready you know. So I did and I we go come porter for the real Monna Varna I have at though to look at it again that the recent against to look, of course. So the rest to made has gone to Mr. Watson's house for the money to also a

Mona began to make the same the original!" she said. "Many Mr. Warsen will immediately see what an authoromy an copy - has been sent him

how we had better each too. The ghi of going there, given there, and a them what we them what we stow a learned about the con-

to save him from near growing the help expectly literal the scale of said the section of the sec something worth while has a series something worth while has I done as that there's anything else market de l'access son't just the best posses ses sure use in ouls one, ton."

And so, carrying the see a two girls set out for Mr I' to Yad Melositic and Horse of the same time, were make that. Welnotte was now cess as he had every measure to -

"We've done ourse and old boy!" he said "We strike than this is going to a "It books good" said livers in

Outside the lower to Melnotte was to go in. > Harry outside. Harry but once they had the more sure to come out. This is seemed that all that you the money. And when W appeared to be expecting to

Wellington Watson, to- winotte. He had brought the ... Museum to his home, expercomfiture when he shows. Monna Vanna Bur when Te was revealed it was he who was a furiously upon Memorte, a go almona asking him what no money fraud. Melnotte, the microscomer that there must more re-in-

"I'll go mack record supported general protuce!" he said But the presidence of a mission was est satisfied

satisfied. Then bim go so will be polleded, then write as selected and the explaint and the hard the man to be has the plates of the Hammaton of Warson, that the man of hard the length of law has

vesterday?"

And, despite Modurative feature in some the butler was sent to call a polynomial. He is bound his whistle, and sook to object that a special policeman, engaged to grand the block, seried how and drarged the interest was a bounce. On these Melnott, and Harry each began to account the other of district the large converted themselves and

victed (houselves and one at the ranger) both were placed under a last The two girls, meanon of had arrived, in time to see what was gone, or they despited that they had chosen a made on the those unit, and went home. But the own law, after they had read the stories in the papers, they declied to go back to their magains plan. Waters we recived them, corduitly. Manual of the case

picions Harry's conduct had review or at the a curious chance, she said has from a Mars was working for Melnotte, and bearing or the plot, had decided to present him toom a nogentianized through the purchase of a strong profile. "And here," said Mary, Manual cally, "is the

real Monna Vanna" There was no doubt this time. Watson and

the president both recognized in "You two ladies," said the president, "were not only upright, but required is clever. I feel that the museum owes you the despest gratitude. A reward of \$1,000 would have been offered for the return of the picture I said great pleasure, now, in writing my check for that sum."

"It isn't enough," said Wat-on, "And I'm grateful, too! I shall give you a certain percentage of the money that I would have given those scoundrels had it not been for your inter-vention!"

That night Mona and Mark, their wardro. ...
restored, their fewels redermed, dired luxuriously in the best restaurant in the city.